

Signed five-spot gains some added value

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers questions about United States paper money.

Q—My grandfather, who died earlier this year, had a long career in government work. Among his belongings is a fresh \$5 bill of series 1950 signed twice by John W. Snyder, secretary of the Treasury. One signature is printed on the bill in the normal position; the other, at a slant, appears to be Snyder's actual autograph. What's it worth?

T.N., Chicago

A—Your item might retail for as much as \$25, according to Chicago coin dealers. Bills bearing signatures of prominent Americans make interesting collectibles, although precise market values are difficult to estimate.

Snyder's printed signature appeared on about 2.1 billion \$5 bills. He may have autographed hundreds of them during his 6½ years as Treasury secretary in President Truman's administration.

Q—I found a \$1 bill with a blank front side, except for the serial numbers and the two seals. The dollar is uncirculated. What would it be worth?

—H.T., Oak Lawn

A—You own a major printing error that retails for at least \$250, according to hobby catalogues. U.S. paper money is printed in three stages: first the back side, then the front, and finally the serial numbers and seals. Obviously, your bill missed the middle step.

Q—We own a 25-cent bill labeled "Military Payment Certificate," series 472. What can you tell us about it?

E.W., South Holland

A—The U.S. armed forces issued such certificates between 1946 and 1973 for use by troops stationed at military bases overseas. The bills have no monetary value today, but some are prized keepsakes, especially those of the higher denominations.

Your 25-cent specimen would retail for from \$2 to \$70, depending on condition. The series 472 notes circulated between 1948 and 1951.

Q—We found a \$1 silver certificate, series 1923, inside a roll-top desk. The bill must be a misprint because it's much larger than ordinary paper money.

C.L., Winnetka

A—Before 1929, Uncle Sam made "greenbacks" 1¼ inch longer and ½ inch wider than today's currency. Officials reduced the size to lower production costs.

A coin dealer might pay at least \$8 for your bill if it's free of tears, holes or severe soiling.